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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

ROBERT FROST'S PLACE IN CONTEMPORARY
AMERICAN POETRY

by

Gertrude Marion Short
(A.B., Boston University, 1909)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

1932

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Robert Frost's Place in Contemporary American Poetry

I Introduction.

"At no time in the history of this country at least," writes Professor J. L. Lowes in CONVENTION AND REVOLT IN POETRY, "has there been so wide-spread interest in poetry. We may carp at the form it takes, we may poke fun at its vagaries, we may leave it, if we please, unread. The fact remains that more people are reading poetry to-day than for a period of many years."

As a part of this renewed interest in poetry, the work of Robert Frost has probably aroused as much interest and discussion as that of any of the present-day poets. One reason is that it is "different" and thus popular in an age that constantly seeks the novel. But the fact that it seems "real", attracts fully as many readers.

Walt Whitman**declares, "Nothing is better than simplicity and nothing can make up for lack of definiteness." Frost's poems meet both these requirements and appeal to twentieth century readers who extol the simple life and demand efficiency and specialization on every hand.

Whitman continues, "Poems distilled from other poems will probably pass away." *** Then lasting popularity should await Frost's best verse, for few poets are so consistently individual. He has no desire blindly to follow established ideals for poetry, and is impatient with pretense and merely decorative combinations of vaguely beautiful words. Frost's is not the poetry of imitative culture. An open mind and an understanding heart are needed

* P.267

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***P.431 --Leaves of Grass--Walt Whitman

I. Introduction

"As no man in the history of this country at least," writes
Professor J. L. Folsom in *CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY*, "has
there been as wide-spread interest in poetry. We may not at the
time have known it, but we may look back at this year, as we look back
at the year 1900, and find that the time has come when the people are
reading poetry again, after a period of many years."

As a part of this renewed interest in poetry, the work of
Robert Frost has probably aroused as much interest and discussion
as that of any of the present-day poets. One reason is that it
is "different" and "new" in an age that desperately needs
the novel. But the fact that it seems "real", attracts fully as
many readers.

Walt Whitman's desire, "Nothing is better than singleness
and nothing can give us for lack of definiteness," Frost's
poems, with their exacting requirements and appeal to twentieth cen-
tury readers who find the simple life and demand efficiency and
specialization in every hand.

Whitman's attitude, "I have distilled from other poems will
be his own," "I am a part of you," "I am a part of you," "I am a part of you,"
Frost's poems, for few poets are so consistently individual.
He has no desire for the "common" or "universal" ideals for poetry,
and is instead with precision and clarity, descriptive of his
of a single, definite world. Frost's is not the poetry of imma-
sion. At one time and an understanding heart are needed

far more than scholarship, to fully appreciate his work. His individuality is further shown in the fact that he discards rhyme and conventional scansion, conforming only to the rhythmic ebb and flow of natural speech. Three lines from his poem, THE ROAD NOT TAKEN, suggest Frost's own procedure:

"Two roads diverged in a wood and I
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference."

The more one reads the work of this free-lance poet, the more one realizes that not since Whittier has there been a verse writer as truly representative of New England. Frost has caught the very spirit of it, as not even Lowell has done.

His ancestors were all hardy New Englanders. In one of his lectures this typical Yankee poet told his audience, "None of the nine generations of the Frost family ever moved more than forty miles from the place where they landed, until my father went to California." Then he added, with a sly smile, "And I came back."

The majority of his poems contain vivid portrayals of New England scenery. When NORTH OF BOSTON first appeared in England, a critic wrote of its author: "Mr. Frost is only expatriated in a physical sense. Living in England, he is nevertheless saturated with New England, for not only is his work New England in subject, it is so in technique."* To quote from one of his own poems:

"The question that he frames in all but words
Is what to make of a diminished thing."

Frost endows a diminished New England, land of his forbears, with romance, memorializing it in deathless song. "Sight and insight are the whole business of the poet," is one of his precepts.

Adopting this theory, he becomes a creator of New England life as he himself has observed it,--not a mere commentator upon its aspects. As a result, so vivid is the sight given the reader that he is stirred into real insight of the essential drama of each situation.

II Biographical Facts that Throw Light on his Poetry.

So intimately related are Frost's history and literary work, that one may best understand his poetry by examining the outstanding facts of his life.

William Prescott Frost, father of the poet, had left his Kingston, N. H. home to follow the lure of the West, where he became editor of a San Francisco newspaper.

It was there, on March 26, 1875, that the boy, christened Robert Lee by his father, who was a great admirer of the Southern general, was born. But he was destined to remain in California only during his early childhood, for the father died when Robert was but ten years of age. At the invitation of her husband's father, who was superintendent of a mill in Lawrence, Mass., Mrs. Frost returned with her boy to the East.

As might be expected of a lad who later reveled in being a non-conformist, Robert accepted grammar school as a necessary evil in life, preferring God's out-of-doors, perhaps

"A pathless wood

Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs

Broken across it, and one eye is weeping

From a twig's having lashed across it open."

where

"A bird with an angelic gift

Was singing in it sweet and swift."

about this theory, he became a student of the subject. As he himself has observed it,--and a more common observation is made. As a result, actively is the right given the teacher that he is entitled into real insight of the essential drama of non-alienation.

II. Historical Notes and Their Effect on the Poetry.

So intensely related are these to the history and literary work that one may best understand the poetry by examining the historical notes of the life.

William Prescott Frost, born in the year 1873, was the son of a farmer. He followed the family tradition of the West, where he was born, and followed the family tradition of the West, where he was born. It was in 1895, on March 2, 1895, that the boy, orphaned by the death of his father, who was a great admirer of the Southern States, was born. But he was destined to remain in California only during his early childhood. For the father died when Robert was but ten years of age. At the invitation of her husband's father, who was a descendant of a mill in Lawrence, Mass., Mrs. Frost returned with her boy to the East.

As might be expected of a lad who later revealed in poetry a non-conformist, Robert attended grammar school as a boarder well in life, preferring his out-of-door, perhaps

"A girl's work"

Where your love burns and flickers with the candle
Bathed in the light, and one by one is waiting
From a girl's hand, having looked across the sea."

NOTE

"A bird with an angelic gift"

The singing in its sweet and soft."

or perhaps

"A leaping tongue of bloom the scythe had spared

Beside a reedy brook the scythe had bared."

Things went better in High School, where he was spurred on by the friendly competition of Elinor Miriam White, a conscientious and studious classmate with whom, at graduation, he tied for the valedictorianship.

A fondness for poetry began in his school days, his initial poem being written at the age of fifteen. Frost still recalls the dusty March day when he returned from school in Lawrence, swinging his books in a strap, while, as he says, "the thing kept going through my heart". "It was about a Spanish conquest, a history book I'd read," he mused. "It had a number of stanzas." On reaching home, he wrote it out. "From that moment I began to write," says he. "I knew I should never do anything else after that. I was lost when I wrote that first poem in ballad form." * THE INDEPENDENT was the first magazine to accept any of his work, when it paid the modest sum of fifteen dollars for the poem MY BUTTERFLY.

In 1893 Frost entered Dartmouth College, where his stay was short, for he declared he found college "a mill for being made into decent boards and he was going to stay a growing tree." ** Like most creative artists, he was ill-attuned to fixed routines and courses of study.

During the next few years he was truly a rolling stone, trying his hand at making shoes, working as a bobbin boy in a mill, editing a weekly paper, and teaching school. Possibly his restless, seemingly undecided drifting was his by inheritance from the elder Frost. Yet like "fallen lance that lies as hurled, but still

*Boston Globe, Nov. 23, 1924
**ROBERT FROST: ORIGINAL "ORDINARY MAN"--Sidney Cox (P.20)

lies pointed, the obstacle that checked and tripped the body, shot the spirit on."

When Miss White had completed her course at St. Lawrence University, in 1895, this struggling young would-be poet succeeded in persuading her to marry him. Munson speaks of their marriage as "a union of idyllic beauty," describing Mrs. Frost as "quiet, sweet, intelligent, and devoted."

Two years later, taking his family with him, he again attempted a college course, this time at Harvard, where he took a real interest in Latin, Greek, and philosophy. But it was such up-hill work that he finally left without a degree.

At length his grandfather, despairing of his settling down to any steady occupation, bought him a farm in Derry, N. H. There he continued to follow the poetic muse, from time to time sending poems to CENTURY, SCRIBNER'S, THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY, HARPER'S, THE INDEPENDENT, and THE YOUTH'S COMPANION. Often they were returned again and again, for he refused to follow suggestions of the publishers, insisting on suiting none but his own taste and creating his own poetic pattern.

His work as a teacher follows his theory of not allowing any job to "press him out of shape". With a rapidly increasing family and no regular income, it became necessary for him to do something more lucrative, so he applied for a position at Pinkerton Academy.

It is interesting to note that his appointment was assured by his reading of the poem, THE TUFT OF FLOWERS, before the Men's Club of one of the churches. Frost once said of this poem, "It got me my first real job. The whole family owe their life to this

*Robert Frost:--Gorham B. Munson

A Study in Sensibility and Good Sense--(Pp.28 and 76)

*Robert Frost:--Gorham B. Munson (P.20)

*Interview with reporter --(Boston Globe Nov. 23, 1924)

the pointed, the object of the study was to show the body, that
the subject on."

These Miss White had completed her course at St. Lawrence University
in 1912, and in 1913, she came to the University of Chicago as
a graduate student, but as a matter of fact, she was not a
"graduate of the University," described Mrs. Frost as "quiet, sweet,
intelligent, and devoted."

Two years later, before she had even begun her studies, she was
in the course, this time at Harvard, where she took a real interest
not in Latin, Greek, and philosophy. But it was such a hill work
that she finally left without a degree.

At length his grandfather, the master of the estate, came
to my study a student, called him a late in Betty, N. H. There
he continued to follow the social music, from time to time reading
books to GEORGE, GARDNER'S, THE AMERICAN MOUNTAIN, HARRIS'S, THE
INDEPENDENT, and THE NEW YORK JOURNAL. Often they were returned
again and again for he refused to follow suggestions of the sub-
ject, insisting on a wide range of his own interests and reading
the one book, "The American Mountain."

His work as a student at the University of Chicago was not
top to "show his own way of thought." With a rapidly increasing knowledge
and as the years passed, it became more and more for him to be working
and, incidentally, as he worked for a number of years at the University.

It is interesting to note that his knowledge was not secured
by the study of the book, THE TYPE OF PROVERB, before the book's
title of one of the chapters. There are also of this book, "If
and only first read the book, the whole family was able to read

poem and they'd better believe it."*

During the five years of Frost's service in this school, he was more or less of an outsider among the faculty members who found it difficult to accept as one of their number, one so informally educated and without a degree. Moreover, his free and easy methods were at odds with the established regime.

The students, on the other hand, welcomed an instructor who had nothing of the taskmaster's attitude, yet possessed a real bent for teaching. Perhaps not until years afterward did they fully appreciate his interest in the individual and his keen desire to draw out any hidden literary talent. He was particularly interested in diffident students thought queer by their classmates. There were many lively discussions in his classes, during which a spirit of comradeship prevailed between the students and this unusual teacher who seemed eager to learn from others, as well as to impart knowledge. Frost has averred that the very best method of teaching, far exceeding the question-and-answer, lecture, or other methods, is communion of minds, which, he declares, is an ever-going self-revelation.**

He came in close personal contact with the pupils in coaching school plays and assisting the editorial board of the school paper. Often he took long walks with them. Occasionally as they tramped along a country road, the odor of frying doughnuts would result in a purchase. Once in a while this popular pedagogue and his boys would even go as far as Manchester where they would browse in a bookstore, have an oyster stew, and ride back by trolley. It was not surprising that gradually, through the influence of this man, changes in Academy methods began to take place.

*ROBERT FROST--Gorham B. Munson (P.80)

**Interview with reporter.--(Boston Globe Nov. 23, 1924)

During the five years of Frost's tenure at the school, he was noted for his of an interest among the faculty members who found it difficult to regard as one of their number, one as inferior, ill educated and without a degree. However, his free and easy methods were in accord with the established tradition.

The students, on the other hand, regarded an instructor who had nothing of the traditional attitude yet possessed a great deal for teaching. Perhaps not until years afterwards did they fully understand his interest in the individual and his desire to draw out any hidden talent. He was particularly interested in difficult students and often over by their side.

There were very few discussions in his classes during which a point of controversy prevailed between the students and this unusual teacher who seemed eager to learn from others, as well as to instruct. Frost has asserted that the very best method of teaching is, far exceeding the traditional answer, to let the student find his own way, which he does.

He came to close personal contact with the people in connection with the school days and assisting the editorial board of the school paper. Often he took long walks with them. Occasionally as they traveled along a country road, the object of their conversation would result in a proposal. Once in a while this conversation would lead him to have a house built for him as a home where they would choose to live. Frost, however, had an ideal, and the work by itself. It was not surprising that gradually, through the influence of this man, changes in Academy methods began to take place.

While there, Frost formed a friendship with Sidney Cox, a teacher in the High School, who later became assistant Professor of English at Dartmouth. Often the two took long walks together. Of the first of these, Cox writes: "When I reached home, I felt from that one talk as I had never done before, what the real nature of poetry is. Scales had been gently lifted off my eyes."

So valuable was Frost's new viewpoint and his ability to stimulate his classes, that, in 1911, he became a co-worker at the State Normal School in Plymouth, N. H. with his former principal at Pinkerton Academy. There he taught English and psychology.

All the while Frost's interest in poetry continued strong, yet the market for it proved extremely limited. Only at rare intervals was a poem accepted by THE FORUM or THE YOUTH'S COMPANION. So he resolved to sell the farm and migrate with his family to England, where a new era of poetry seemed to be starting, with writers experimenting with new subjects and new forms. One of his chief diversions while there was attendance at the informal bookshop discussions of Harold Munro. Munson**tells an amusing incident of one such occasion when he was sitting silently on the stairs amid a group of English poets, when one on the step below him looked up and said, "You're an American!"

"Yes," replied Frost, "how did you know?"

"By your shoes," was the quick rejoinder.

In 1913, this author who had as yet "no honor in his own country" carefully sorted his better poems and sought an English publisher. It was not long before the firm of David Nutt consented

*Robert Frost, Original ORDINARY MAN--Sidney Cox--(P.52)

**Robert Frost: A STUDY IN SENSIBILITY AND GOOD SENSE--(P.63)
--Gorham B. Munson

to publish the volume, which appeared under the title of A BOY'S WILL, the first review of which was written by Ezra Pound.

After England had likewise favored his second volume NORTH OF BOSTON, America awoke to the skill of this writer whom it had spurned for twenty years. Thus the poet who had arrived in England a semi-failure returned to the United States "with his feet well set upon the ladder of fame." * "A poet star of exceptional magnitude has risen for New England," writes Sylvester Baxter in 1915. ** "Yet it was in old England that it emerged from a misty horizon, there to be recognized for what it was."

Frost's principal avocations in recent years have been farming and lecturing, to both college students and that portion of the general public possessing a real interest in poetry.

Though his farming methods have been such as no agricultural college would approve, his farms seem to have furnished him the background of manual labor and contact with nature, needed for furthering his poetic progress. In the following lines Frost, not above poking fun at himself, reveals the secret of his lack of real success as a farmer:

"You know Orion always comes up sideways,

Throwing a leg up over our fence of mountains,

And rising on his hands, he looks in on me

Busy outdoors by lantern-light with something

I should have done by daylight, and indeed,

After the ground is frozen, I should have done

Before it froze, and a gust flings a handful

Of waste leaves at my smoky lantern chimney

To make fun of my way of doing things,

*MODERN AMERICAN POETRY--Amy Lowell--P.131

**New England's New Poet--Sylvester Baxter

(THE AMERICAN REVIEW OF REVIEWS: Vol.51 P.432)

to which the volume, which appeared under the title of A BOY'S
WILL, the first volume of what was called the Barefoot

After William had finished his second volume NORTH
OF BOSTON, America came to the aid of this writer whom it had
counted for twenty years. Thus the poet who had arrived in England
a semi-fallen returned to the United States with his feet well
set upon the ladder of fame. "A poet star of exceptional merit"
thus has risen for the English, writes Sylvester Barker in 1912.
Yet it was in of England that it began to show a slight horizon,
there to be recognized for what it was.

Those's original system in recent years have been
in and America, so both college students and that portion of
the general public possessing a real interest in poetry.

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colleges would approve, his aims seem to have furnished him the
backbone of natural labor and contact with nature, needed for
furthering the poetic process. In the following lines Frost
not above making fun at himself, reveals the secret of his lack
of real progress as a farmer:

"You know often always come up sideways,
"thrusting a leg up over your heads of mountains;
And when, on his hands, he looks in on me
They ponder the lantern-light with something
I should have done by daylight, and indeed,
After the ground is frozen, I should have done
Before it froze, and a blue light a hand
Of water-frozen at my elbow, bent to change
To make fun of my way of doing things."

*MODERN AMERICAN POETRY--by Lowell-P. 151
*How England's New Poet--Sylvester Barker
(THE AMERICAN REVIEW OF REVIEWS: Vol. 11, p. 438)

Or else fun of Orion's having caught me."

He even confesses to having milked cows at ten o'clock in the evening so that he need not rise early the following morning.

As a public lecturer, Frost always has something to say and says it well. It is related* that at the beginning of his lecture career, he was so nervous before a crowd that he trod on pebbles so the physical pain would take his mind off his mental misery. Yet he even then took a sly satisfaction in surprising audiences who underrated him because he had no college degree.

Had he not supplemented farming with still further teaching, this time in college, he would probably have found it difficult to make a living. He once declared that the first twenty years of delving into poetry brought him a financial return of only two hundred dollars.

He was a member of the Amherst College faculty from 1916 to 1919, where he continued in his own unstereotyped fashion to stimulate in his students a love of creative literature. Farrar** speaks of him as "a great teacher for the man who knows how to benefit by great teaching." Professor Hedges of Beloit*** calls his willingness to harness himself to the task of teaching freshmen in an American college, "an event which ought to rock the educational world."

The year 1921 brought him a call from the University of Michigan to fill its newly established fellowship in creative art. Although the original plan was to award this fellowship

*ROBERT FROST: A STUDY IN SENSIBILITY AND GOOD SENSE--(P.48)

--Gorham B. Munson

**ROBERT FROST AND OTHER GREEN MOUNTAIN WRITERS

--John Farrar (THE ENGLISH JOURNAL: Vol. XVI)--(P.584)

***CREATIVE TEACHING--M. H. Hedges (SCHOOL and SOCIETY: Vol. 7--P.117)

*Boston Globe--Nov. 22, 1924

**ROBERT FROST: A STUDY IN SENSIBILITY AND GOOD SENSE--Gorham B. Munson (P.48)

to a different artist each year, he whom one professor had referred to as "a countrified poet" retained it for two successive years. At Ann Arbor he was freed from all obligation to conform to any rules of the university. Remarking on the absence of any routine duties, social or academic, he once said, "I have nothing but the spur of my own spirit to prod me on". He then added, "I go primarily for my own work, but I wouldn't go if I wasn't interested in education. I look on myself as a stake where the engineers are staking out the line for the next advance in education."*

It is interesting to note that he has quietly climbed from a faculty member in a small academy to the same position in a normal school and then to a college professorship without conforming to academic dictates. Perhaps there is no greater proof of Frost's ability than the fact that his resistance to the established system of American education ended in its making a place for him at his own terms.

In 1925, he was invited to return to the University of Michigan to hold a life fellowship in poetry. But the call of New England was so strong that, like a homing pigeon, he returned to the place he had purchased not long before, amid the hills of South Shaftesbury, Vermont.

During 1926 and 1927 he distributed his teaching efforts among several colleges,--Wesleyan, Amherst, Michigan, and Dartmouth, where he mingled with the students and faculty, gave lectures and readings and held conferences with literary aspirants. Doubtless these collegiate folk agreed with Munson** that "Frost does his teaching by simply being what he is."

Of late years, honors have been heaped upon him. No fewer

*Boston Globe--Nov. 23, 1924

**ROBERT FROST: A STUDY IN SENSIBILITY AND GOOD SENSE--Gorham B. Munson
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than five colleges,--Amherst, University of Michigan, Yale, Middlebury, and Bowdoin have conferred honorary degrees upon him. On one occasion, he was Phi Beta Kappa poet at Harvard, where he read THE AXE-HELVE which later appeared in NEW HAMPSHIRE.

Frost also became an honorary member of the P.E.N. Club to which Hardy, Anatole France, and other famous writers have belonged. The Women's Clubs of Vermont conferred on him the title of Poet Laureate of their state.

It is significant that his poetry has been included in the course for English teachers at the Sorbonne and that critical estimates of his work have appeared in Italy.

His volumes of poetry have twice won Pulitzer prizes and only recently the first one-thousand-dollar award of the National Institute of Arts and Letters was presented to Frost. Individual poems have also won prizes. In 1922, THE WITCH OF COOS was selected by POETRY: A MAGAZINE OF VERSE as the most deserving entry. Surely recognition has heaped itself upon this quiet poet. Many an editor who once refused to accept his poems has come to see the time when he snatches eagerly at such a chance. It must be a real satisfaction to Frost that he has succeeded in producing poetry that is both artistic and commercially satisfactory.

III Frost, the Man.

Before considering the poetic output which has brought him all these honors, let us get a more intimate view of the man himself and the personality which so closely underlies most of his poems.

Should we draw up before his one-hundred-and-thirty-year-

old home of rough stone, on a day when "the air was stifling sweet with the breath of many flowers," we should quite possibly find him seated on the rear piazza, passively watching the fountain he himself had made,--a simple, friendly, genuine sort of man, his graying hair tumbling a bit rakishly over twinkling, bright blue eyes, gentle yet searching,--with whimsical crinkles playing hide and seek around the corners.

Here is Farrar's *portrait of Robert Frost: "The large head, with its calm brow, the clear eyes, the firm jaw, display the poet, the dreamer, the stubborn thinker." One editor** says, "The cast of his features bears out the cast of his mind," and continues, "Frost's skin and his rebellious hair have now a fine harmony of tone, 'the grey of the moss of walls', a young and living greyness that, like a delicate lichen, softens without hiding the hard and eternal shape of the rock beneath."

Part of his charm lies in the rich, musical voice. He impresses one as a man of force, but one who thinks and acts slowly. There is something about the set of his jaw that suggests the passive fighter who refuses to be other than himself under any circumstances; a man whose habits of life and thought would remain unaltered by the dictates of system or fashion. Noting the sensitivity, gravity, and friendliness of his countenance, one feels sure that the Robert Frost who once said, "I guess I must be just an ordinary man," is one with extraordinary powers of insight, a man with a vision. He is, indeed, thoroughly human, often boyishly frank, seeming to view life with a kind of amused attachment. His dignity

*ROBERT FROST and OTHER GREEN MOUNTAIN WRITERS (P. 584)

--John Farrar (THE ENGLISH JOURNAL: Vol. XVI)

**ROBERT FROST: A GOOD GREEK out of NEW ENGLAND

--THE NEW REPUBLIC, Sept. 30, 1925. --P.144-145

and gentleness of spirit, his tolerance, all are qualities that draw one to him. On further acquaintance, one is aware that his chief interest lies not in the possession of things, but in the development of his art. While extremely sensitive to slights and rebuffs, he never speaks slightly of others and is loyal itself in his relations with friends.

In fact, Frost's interest in people and his neighborliness are among his outstanding characteristics. "What impressed me most about him," says Benjamin,*--"and this, I believe, illuminates much of his poetry--was his warm friendliness, his genuineness, his almost quaint simplicity, his neighborliness, the latter quality being the very essence of the man." Even on the lecture platform he charms his audiences with his friendly, informal manner, seeming to take them into his confidence. There is no hint of the egotistical or the exclusive about him. Rather he is utterly natural and without affectation.

Frost delights in coming in touch with all levels of life, success having made no change in him. In describing a visit to him, Benjamin writes, "I was struck with the affection with which he was greeted by his neighbors as we spun along in the wheezy Ford, with the pride with which he pointed out farm and hillside." The romance of human brotherhood suggested in his poems undoubtedly springs from the kindly human intercourse he has enjoyed with his hilltop neighbors who, like himself, have stored up firewood against the winter months, nurtured apple trees in rocky orchards, and mended live fences. Frost has

*ROBERT FROST-POET OF NEIGHBORLINESS

--Paul L. Benjamin (THE SURVEY: Vol. 45)--P.318)

always been in close relation with the people of the community, conversing with them around the firesides of their homes and reading his poems at their church entertainments. No wonder he has captured the friendship of his fellow Vermonters. The liking for many years has been reciprocal. How this came to be, is interesting. Said Frost, in an interview with a "Boston Globe" reporter, "At first I disliked the Yankees. They were cold. They seemed narrow to me. I could not get used to them. Then, when I was about eighteen or nineteen, there came to me the pride of discernment and I found some good in them. I went on finding good in them, and after that it was hard for me to find any bad in them."*

Dorothy Canfield Fisher** gives interesting evidence of the fact that Robert Frost is utterly natural,--as good a friend and neighbor as he is a poet. While she was in conversation with a visitor from the city who had been denouncing all authors as "simply impossible and thoroughly engrossed with themselves", a neighbor, with his wife and little grandson, drove up. Conversation ran from one topic to another,--village gossip, farming, foreign affairs, on all of which there was obvious firsthand knowledge on the part of the farmer neighbor, who interspersed keen, searching questions in such interesting fashion that the city visitor later exclaimed, "Why can't authors be like him--natural, unaffected, interested in the outside world? Just show me an author who's as fine a human being as that gray-haired farmer; who's moved out of himself into a bigger place as that countryman has;

*Boston Globe--Nov. 23, 1924

**ROBERT FROST: A NEIGHBOR OF MINE--Dorothy Canfield Fisher
(CURRENT LITERATURE: Week of Jan. 12-16, 1931)

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Dorothy Gentile Fisher** gives interesting evidence of the fact that Robert Frost is utterly natural,--as good a friend and neighbor as he is a poet. While she was in conversation with a visitor from the city who had been discussing all authors as "always inaccessible and thoroughly engrossed with themselves", a neighbor, with his wife and little grand-son, drove up. Conversation ran from one topic to another,--village gossip, farming, foreign affairs, on all of which there was obvious firsthand knowledge on the part of the former neighbor, who interested them, raising questions in such interesting fashion that the city visitor later exclaimed, "Why can't authors be like him--natural, untroubled, interested in the outside world? Just show me an author who's as fine a human being as that grey-haired farmer; who's moved out of himself into a bigger place as that countryman has;

*Boston Globe--Nov. 23, 1924
 **ROBERT FROST: A NEIGHBOR OF MINE--Dorothy Gentile Fisher
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who can talk on equal terms with another farmer and with a transatlantic traveler; who's grown to be one with a fine wife as a man can only after years of deep living; who has time to live with his grandchildren; who never once in a long conversation brings the talk around to himself. Why, just the way that man looks at a person shows that he sees that he's there as much a human being as he is!"

Then, to his amazement, came the reply, "That very human individual, Sir, is Robert Frost, leader among American poets!"

With the opportunity which the combination of farming and authorship has given him to lead the relaxed, unhurried life that he craves, a life untroubled by the intricacies of industry and crowded humanity, Frost has kept his eye fixed on achieving a quality of expression that should satisfy his own standards rather than that of an admiring public, for he has always been quite immune to the lure of fame. Indeed, he seems to have succeeded in living freer from inward and outward pressure than most men. There is an air of pastoral leisure in his poems that is suggested in the lines:

"I take the reins
Only when someone's coming, and the mare
Stops when she likes. I tell her when to go."
He enjoys working with his hands and prefers, as he once said "to live in such quiet circumstances that he can lean against life until it has stung him into utterance."

Sidney Cox's *estimate of Frost gives an excellent idea of his character: "He is not a decent product of life's ironing out. He is an original man whose extraordinariness

*Robert Frost, Original ORDINARY MAN--Sidney Cox--(P.39)

is partly due to his never having bargained away any of the endowment of the genius man."

Waldo Frank has paid him one of the greatest tributes in saying: "Frost is not only a beautiful poet. He is a beautiful person."*

IV His Poetic Output.

A. A BOY'S WILL

Frost's first volume of poems, which appeared in 1913, is largely lyric, unity being established by a series of notes under each heading in the table of contents, intended as a sort of interpretation of life according to his own individuality. The poems are nearly all subjective, revealing bits of Frost's philosophy and attitude toward the world. Often these are merely suggested, as in TRIAL BY EXISTENCE, where he gives us the thought that even in Paradise bravery will still count and that we are destined

"To find that the utmost reward

Of daring should be still to dare."

Untermeyer** characterizes this volume as "one of concentrated emotion and close-packed psychology." In the words of Prof. Phelps,*** "A BOY'S WILL is based on Frost's habit of introspection, which gives him both the method and the insight necessary for the accurate study of nature and his neighbors. Frost," he adds, "discovered what people are like by looking into his own heart."

Not until he was thirty-eight did he divulge his longings as a youth and reveal how he later found satisfaction in the

*ROBERT FROST: ORIGINAL ORDINARY MAN--Sidney Cox--(P.39)

**THE NEW ERA IN AMERICAN POETRY--Louis Untermeyer--(P.21)

***COLD PASTORAL--William Lyon Phelps (THE BOOKMAN, 1918--P.136)

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***GOLD PASTORAL--William-Lyon Phelps (THE BOOKMAN, 1913--p. 13)
**THE NEW ERA IN AMERICAN POETRY--Louis Untermeyer--(p. 21)
*ROBERT FROST: ORIGINAL ORDINARY MAN--Eliot Cox--(p. 38)

everyday relations with those about him, discovering through small daily tasks the dignity of labor. In poems like THE TUFT OF FLOWERS, we are made to feel the common joy, effort, and weariness under the common task. In this volume, which contains the best of the poems written during the early period of self-training, the author attempts to give expression to a boy's social and intellectual growth and the gradual unfolding of his personality.

Being highly subjective, the poems of this first book give interesting personal glimpses of later manhood. The following suggest the Robert Frost, poetry lovers of America admire:

"They would not find me changed from him they knew--

Only more sure of all I thought was true."

--INTO MY OWN

"Come with rain, O loud Southwester!

Scatter poems on the floor.

Turn the poet out of door."

--TO THE THAWING WIND

"If tired of trees, I seek again mankind."

--THE VANTAGE POINT

"Ah, when to the heart of man

Was it ever less than treason

To go with the drift of things?"

--RELUCTANCE

Nature poems abound in A BOY'S WILL. Flowers, trees, the wind and storms, stars, and the seasons are presented in Frost's own vivid manner. One of the finest of these is MOWING which again pictures the joy of labor, the thrill that comes with "the long scythe whispering to the ground."

B. NORTH OF BOSTON

Perhaps his most outstanding book of poetry is NORTH OF BOSTON, which first came out in England a year after A BOY'S WILL. The wonder is that Frost could create across the water scenes and characters so true to New England, but, at the time of writing he was possessed of a desperate longing for the hills of home, which doubtless helped him to visualize his subjects.

Here we have a book of people,--the humble country folk Frost knew so well,--living isolated, lonely lives. In fact, it is in terms of people that he regards country life. Events center around them, so that to the reader there comes the sense of a community with which he acquires an intimate acquaintance.

As a preface to this interesting group of bucolic idylls, we find the intriguing little poem called, YOU COME TOO, with its invitation so simple and friendly one can almost catch the tone of voice.

The poems in NORTH OF BOSTON, are no mere creations of the author's mind. His are really authentic pictures of New England life and scenery. The outstanding traits of the hill country folk,--now pride and grim endurance, now the dry, delicious humor of the kindly and thrifty Yankee farmer,--are brought out with a sure and genuine touch by this poet who knows intimately the scenes and people he describes.

What a wealth of human nature there is in poems such as THE CODE, in which a farmhand, resentful at having been told by his employer to work faster, almost buries him alive, in order to prove his efficiency in unloading; or in A SERVANT TO SERVANTS, where a wistful woman, "with a houseful of hungry men to feed," resignedly concludes, "I s'pose I've got to go the road I'm going."

There is a folksy neighborliness in MENDING WALL. This poem takes up the theme where THE TUFT OF FLOWERS left it, continuing the thought with which the latter closes:

" 'Men work together,' I told him from the heart,
 'Whether they work together or apart'."

Professor Rand of Massachusetts State College, in a recent lecture on RUSTIC POETRY eulogized MENDING WALL as the most important lyric that America has ever contributed to poetry. Edward Garnett* says of it, "Had Wordsworth written these lines, I think they must have stood in every English anthology."

Frost seems to have a real insight into the human heart. How true is Sidney Cox's statement:** "He is interested in people a little odd in soul or circumstance whom he has known and sympathized with, in characteristics not well known because they are in shades harder to see than heroism or generosity, and in ordinary situations that involve queer, unliterary mixtures of emotion." Who can forget the pathetic outburst of the mother in HOME BURIAL? In THE DEATH OF THE HIRED MAN,

*FROST'S NORTH OF BOSTON IN FRIDAY NIGHTS

--Edward Garnett--P.225

**ROBERT FROST, ORIGINAL ORDINARY MAN--Sidney Cox--P.29-30

the author's "precious saving sense of humanity" ^{*} is at its best in the account of the farmer whose wife pleads with him to refrain from hurting the feelings of poor, wornout Silas, who had come "home" to die when working days were done. In contrast to this poem is that jovial narrative, A HUNDRED COLLARS, much of the interest of which lies in the wholly unlike characters of the crude, drunken Lafe, "moving into a size larger shirt" and the timid, perturbed college professor of the Size 14 collar. It is indicative of Frost's versatile skill that he can present both the sunnier side of the provincial temperament and the pathos of thwarted desires for beauty and happiness.

The realism of this New Hampshire poet seems scarcely to fit the old, established ideals of poetry. In fact, it is this making poetry speak in human tones, which sets him apart from other writers of verse. He regularly subordinates metrical patterns to the cadences of everyday speech, his theory being that verse should produce for the reader the actual speaking tone of an imagined voice. This probably accounts for the frequency of monolog and dialog in his poetry.

The many domestic scenes afford opportunity for colorful, colloquial language. We even catch the rise and fall of the human voice, the stressed pauses and little hurries of spoken language that cannot be imposed or invented. Note how true this is in selected lines from BLUEBERRIES:

" 'I don't know what part of the pasture you mean.'

'You know where they cut off the woods--let me see--

It was two years ago--or no!--can it be

No longer than that?'

'He saw you, then? What did he do? Did he frown?'

'I'm sure--I'm sure--

Let me see,

Mame, we don't know any good berrying place?'"

A reading of the foregoing lines will convince one that Frost lives up to his own requirements that "a good sentence does double duty: it conveys one meaning by word and syntax, another by the tone of voice it indicates." He seems to have preserved the vigor of speech of ordinary people, eliminating whatever is vulgar and petty. Freeman* sums up the matter thus:

"The beauty that is heard in Frost's verse is a beauty of natural sounds and clear-breathed tones, caught in their fall by an ear singularly quick and easy, yet still--like all that's human--imperfect, and given to the reader unspoiled and unenriched in verse that is, at its best, a delicate delight."

Rare observation is behind his choice of words. He makes no attempt at dialect, including only native tricks of speech he has actually heard his neighbors use. "Yet through the homely quiet words," comments Amy Lowell,** "rises a faint pungency, the very aroma of poesy floating thinly up into air."

Setting also is a powerful force in the portrayal of character in NORTH OF BOSTON. In the case of the shrewd farmer in MENDING WALL who clings so persistently to the precept, "Good

*CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN AUTHORS--John Freeman--P.41

**ROBERT FROST IN TENDENCIES IN MODERN AMERICAN POETRY

--Amy Lowell--P.104

fences make good neighbors," we have so fine an interplay of country background and the two view points of those on either side of the wall, that Untermeyer refers to this poem as "possibly the finest piece of genre painting in our poetry." In A SERVANT TO SERVANTS, we have the terrible background of a bride brought into a house where her husband's mad brother lives in a sort of cage. Her own on-creeping insanity is the direct result of the frightful routine of a drab, monotonous life made up of "cooking meals for hungry hired men and washing dishes after them."

Frost never generalizes. His are always pictures of particular people such as are given in THE HOUSEKEEPER and THE SELF-SEEKER. He has carried out Goethe's pronouncement that "the poetry of a true, real, natural vision of life demands descriptive power of the highest degree, rendering a poet's pictures so lifelike that they become actualities to every reader." Nowhere does Frost apologize for his material. With tools other poets might discard, he can work magic, for he is an incomparable story teller, with ability to cast such a spell upon the reader that he seems to be observing each scene.

Many of these are so vividly given that Frost's work has been accused of being grim and gruesome. In his defense, Dorothy Canfield Fisher* writes:

"His poetry doesn't seem to those who love it 'sombre and depressing'. To us his poetry seems the very distillation of human life as we know it, with its strong, aromatic savor of both bitterness and pungent satisfactions."

The emotional appeal in the tragic stories of the characters in NORTH OF BOSTON cannot help being strong. Yet there is no intentional effort on Frost's part to play upon the heart strings of the reader. One might expect something of social judgment and condemnation in such a poem as THE SELF-SEEKER, where the chief character consents to accepting the paltry sum of five hundred dollars for having had his legs so badly crushed that he could never again go in search of the flowers he loved so well. Yet Frost gives us nothing but a glimpse of the soul of the man. While he must have felt deeply the pathos of deserted farms and dwindling townships, we find no morbid brooding in his poems. He merely presents the facts,-- the tragedies and comedies of work and love and death. It is as though he had become a sort of spiritual interpreter of the countryside.

Somehow we are made to feel that the author sympathizes with these folk who must endure the daily monotony of isolated farm life in a degenerating community. One cannot but sense the author's tenderness in the case of the hired man who has come to the only home he knows, "the place where when you have to go there, they have to take you in":

"Poor Silas, so concerned for other folk,
And nothing to look forward to with pride,
And nothing to look forward to with hope."

This same tenderness plays about and through most of the stark realism to be found in his poems, especially that which is shot with situations of horror.

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Having himself participated in what he pictures, he is enabled to give an atmosphere of reality to such poems as AFTER APPLE-PICKING and MENDING WALL, which contain the very spirit of labor. This is reflected in such lines as:

"My instep arch not only keeps the ache,

It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round."

Another poem of this type is THE WOODPILE, whose character "lived in turning to fresh tasks."

In no other volume is Frost's dramatic power so evident. There are climactic moments in his longer dialogs which grip the reader as truly as any stage performance. In fact, he believes that a poem should create a situation as well as a play. He works up to tense climaxes in skillful fashion. In HOME BURIAL, it is centered in a single word, the heart-rending cry of the bereaved mother: "Don't, don't!"

It seems a bit odd that Frost has only once attempted actual drama,--A WAY OUT, which was published in New York by the Harbor Press and dedicated to Roland A. Wood, who created the part of Asie when it was given in the Academy of Music in Northampton, Mass.

There is enough of the dramatist in Frost, the poet, so that he shows a lively feeling for situations. Excellent evidence of this is found in the close of the poem, THE DEATH OF THE HIRED MAN, which is charged with human emotion:

" 'Go, look, see for yourself.

But, Warren, please remember how it is:

He's come to help you ditch the meadow.

He has a plan. You mustn't laugh at him.

He may not speak of it, and then he may.

I'll sit and see if that small sailing cloud
Will hit or miss the moon.'

It hit the moon.

Then there were three there, making a dim row,
The moon, the little silver cloud, and she!

Warren returned--too soon, it seemed to her,
Slipped to her side, caught up her hand and waited.

'Warren?' she questioned.

'Dead,' was all he answered."

Often a tense situation is created merely by suggestion, without anything actually happening. In THE FEAR, it is only a stranger, not her avenging husband, who appears in the road before the unfaithful wife, whereupon she faints, in a sudden wave of relief after tense moments of fear and uncertainty.

Frost is also fond of cumulative effects. One instance of this method is found in the poem, THE MOUNTAIN, the reader all the while becoming more and more impressed with the vastness of the huge bulk that "held the town as in a shadow."

C. MOUNTAIN INTERVAL

We turn now from NORTH OF BOSTON of which THE TIMES once said, "Poetry burns up out of it, as when a faint mind breathes upon smouldering embers", to MOUNTAIN INTERVAL, which appeared in 1916. "This volume," says Freeman*, "adds by way of repetition and not by difference."

The book is not so homogeneous as NORTH OF BOSTON, for

*ROBERT FROST--John Freeman--P.31
(Contemporary American Authors)

Call attention to the fact that the

the same is also true of the

It is not necessary

then to be very much concerned, and

The same, the same, the same, the same

There is no need to be concerned

It is not necessary to be concerned

It is not necessary to be concerned

It is not necessary to be concerned

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There is no need to be concerned

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There is no need to be concerned

There is no need to be concerned

There is no need to be concerned

It is not necessary to be concerned

There is no need to be concerned

There is no need to be concerned

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There is no need to be concerned

in it we find, in addition to such skillful dramatic dialogs as *IN THE HOME STRETCH*, delightful lyrics and bits of description, both of character and the out-of-doors. It has more of personal and less of communal life. There is the same rare portrayal of human nature, the same remarkable intensity, as in *THE HILL WIFE*, something of the whimsical and imaginative in such a poem as *THE TELEPHONE*; real humor in *BROWN'S DESCENT*; and the oldtime skill in vivid presentation of tense situations in the long poem, *SNOW* at the end of the volume. The long narratives have neither the depth nor the poignancy of those in *NORTH OF BOSTON*, but lyrics such as *AN ENCOUNTER* and *PEA BRUSH* have a more highly developed quality than his earlier attempts. It is interesting to note that two poems in the book, *RANGE-FINDING* and *THE BONFIRE* are not based on country life, their theme being war. All in all, there is a more genial humor, a happier and more mellow undercurrent in *MOUNTAIN INTERVAL* than in the preceding volume.

One of the most significant poems is the one which comes first. *THE ROAD NOT TAKEN* has an autobiographical flavor. One cannot read the closing lines:

"I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference."

without feeling that it is because Frost has left the beaten highway in poetry and missed none of the beauty of the untrodden obscure trails, that he has a significant place in American poetry to-day.

In many of the poems of this book, the reader is conscious of Frost's oneness with Nature. To him a birch tree, a brook, the song of a bird offer companionship. We feel certain that

the poet includes himself in the line:

"We love the things we love for what they are."

The poem, *THE SOUND OF THE TREES*, offers further evidence of how closely Frost is in touch with the realm of Nature.

Frost has favorites among the seasons, too. Occasionally we find him "slave to a springtime passion for the earth," but usually he is revealing some aspect of his favorite time of year,--winter. It is somewhat of a coincidence that this writer who so often pictures winter landscapes, should have the name "Frost." A goodly number of the poems in which this season is insistent, are included in this volume.

In *AN OLD MAN'S WINTER NIGHT*, we have an unforgettable picture of lonely old age, painted with words meticulously selected for their connotative power. It is as if the reader had the aid of television in peering "through the thin frost, almost in separate stars" at this aged, heavily breathing man as he slumbers on beside the log-filled stove in the still moonlight of a winter's night.

Then there is the delightful *CHRISTMAS CIRCULAR LETTER*, telling of the would-be purchaser who came amid whirls of snow for that the city "could not do without and keep its Christmas," offering three cents each.

One of the gems of this book is the eight-lined picture, *A PATCH OF OLD SNOW*. Simplicity itself, it recalls with kaleidoscopic vividness to the mind of any New England reader, a forlorn remnant of winter, "speckled with grime," resembling "a blow-away paper the rain had brought to rest."

Here also is to be found the amusing account of Farmer Brown's lantern-lighted slide down an icy slope where we follow

him through tense moments in the frigid darkness before dawn to the final landing, where, bethinking him that "ile's about out," he trudges grimly back home over the long two miles of road. This poem, in which Frost has caught the Yankee drollery to perfection, contains a particularly fine bit of character drawing:

"Yankees are what they always were.

Don't think Brown ever gave up hope

Of getting home again because

He couldn't climb that slippery slope;

Or even thought of standing there

Until the January thaw

Should take the polish off the crust.

He bowed with grace to natural law,

And then went round it on his feet,

After the manner of our stock."

There is an even more dramatic description in SNOW of Meserve's fight through cold and dark and storm, to the shelter of his own home. One is held tense with suspense until, relieved, he hears the voice of Meserve on the telephone, almost like that of one returned from the dead.

In direct contrast to the foregoing are THE COW IN APPLE TIME ("Her face is flecked with pomace and she drools a cider syrup."), HYL A BROOK, "run out of song and speed," and BIRCHES, one of the most popular lyrics of this outdoor poet, which is redolent of memories of the days when he found joy in being "a swinger of birches" and loved to "climb black branches up

a snow-white trunk toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more."

Almost the only hint of grim tragedy in MOUNTAIN INTERVAL is in the poem with the arresting title, 'OUT, OUT--' in which the frightful results of a snarling buzz-saw are described as none but Frost can do it.

It will be seen that this poet is not subject, as is the farmer, to the law of diminishing returns, for in his first three volumes he has cultivated the same soil, with a successful crop each time.

D. NEW HAMPSHIRE

It was seven years before another volume of Frost's poetry appeared. In NEW HAMPSHIRE he has extracted new and rich treasure from known veins of ore, lyrical and narrative. One feels in it a note of fulfillment, which has come as the poet's life has been enriched and eased, but not basically altered, by success. This collection of poems won the Pulitzer Prize for 1923 and ran to five printings.

The poem which gives the book its title stands out from all Frost's others. Wood* calls it "a bit of meditative fooling." It is said to have been written in a day and a night, though the idea for it had probably been revolving in the poet's mind for a long time. It romps along in merry fashion. In it there are choice bits of pleasant irony like the following:

"Election night once in Franconia,
When everything had gone Republican

And Democrats were sore in need of comfort:

Easton goes Democratic, Wilson 4

Hughes 2."

Again--

"I met a Californian who would
Talk California--a state so blessed,
He said, in climate, none had ever died there
A natural death, and Vigilance Committees
Had had to organize to stock the graveyards
And vindicate the state's humanity.

That's what comes

Of being in the market with a climate."

He even pokes fun at himself in the lines:

"A state producing precious metals, stones,
And--writing; none of these except perhaps
The precious literature in quantity
Or quality to worry the producer
About disposing of it.

Of the poems which follow, THE AXE-HELVE is perhaps most characteristic of its author. This time it is the Frenchman, Baptiste, who stands out as in bas-relief. He "knew how to make a short job long for love of it and yet not waste time either." He it was who could produce an axe with "no false curves put on from without," having only those "native to the grain." It is something of this same quality of native strength that makes Robert Frost's poems examples of skilled craftsmanship.

The "grace notes" are fittingly named, for they are light

as DUST OF SNOW, the title of one of the daintiest:

"The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree
Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued."

This and other poems of this volume remind us that Frost is a New Hampshire farmer as well as poet. One of the loveliest is STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING:

"Whose woods these are I think I know
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.
My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.
He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake."

The stanzas quoted seem actually to make one feel as though he, too, were watching the woods fill with snow as he sits

52
The first of the
The first of the
The first of the

From a medical view
The first of the
The first of the

Has a very high
A number of good
And saved some parts

At a day I had read
This and other cases of this volume being as that first
is a very valuable book as well as good. One of the low level
is supported by a good and a very good.

"These books are I think I know
His name is in the village of the
He will not be disappointed here

To reach the world with us will know
The first of the world with us will know

My first book was about the first
To stop at the first of the world
The first of the world with us will know

He will not be disappointed here
The first of the world with us will know

The first of the world with us will know
The first of the world with us will know

The first of the world with us will know
The first of the world with us will know

beside this true worshipper of winter beauty. This poem is a good example of Frost's ability to draw landscapes so sharply that they seem very near.

Another admirable winter picture is found in *THE RUNAWAY*, a poem about a little Morgan colt who snorted with dipped head, a dim, gray shadow against a curtain of falling flakes." In his inimitable fashion, Frost writes:

"I think the little fellow's afraid of the snow.

I doubt if even his mother could tell him, 'Sakes,
It's only weather.'"

Other poems in which the poet's favorite season figures prominently are *GOOD-BYE AND KEEP COLD*, which is strongly suggestive of wintry storm and dreariness, and *THE ONSET*, the two stanzas of which contrast gathering snow, heaping undrifted, foot on foot, and the final triumph of the peeper's silver croak in the springtime. This forms a sort of transition between the verse with winter atmosphere and the lines entitled *BLUE-BUTTERFLY DAY*, which flash before our eyes "more unmixed color on the wing than flowers will show for days unless they hurry."

Another rare springtime gem, *NOTHING GOLD CAN STAY* has between the lines the saddening thought that all joyous things, like "Nature's first green," are as fleeting as dawn. It is indicative of Frost's awareness of the evanescence of things and of the realization that only in memory and imagination is there any permanence of beauty.

A vivid bit of autumn description in *WILD GRAPES* closes with lines of thoughtful meditation of the sort so character-

istic of Frost:

"I had not taken the first step in knowledge;
I had not learned to let go with the hands,
As still I have not learned to with the heart,
And have no wish to with the heart--nor need,
That I can see. The wind--is not the heart.
I may yet live, as I know others live,
To wish in vain to let go with the mind--
Of cares, at night, to sleep; but nothing tells me
That I need learn to let go with the heart."

The poem, NOT TO KEEP, is an excellent example of Frost's skill in concentration. There is characteristic restraint in his depicting of the grief of the wife whose wounded husband has been given back to her, only to have "the same grim giving to do over for them both."

The note of tragedy appears also in THE CENSUS-TAKER,
"Where the melancholy of having to count souls
When they grow fewer every year
Is extreme when they shrink to nothing at all."

In the poem, TWO WITCHES, we come upon an element rather rare in the poetry of this skillful New Englander,--the use of the supernatural. Even such vivid details are given as the sound of the bones clumping up the attic stairs. The atmosphere throughout is tense and somewhat gruesome, particularly the climax where the mother attempts to find the finger bone of Toffile, the skeleton, among her buttons.

A careful perusal of this fourth volume makes one understand the comment of John Farrar*:

*ROBERT FROST AND OTHER GREEN MOUNTAIN WRITERS

(THE ENGLISH JOURNAL: Vol. XVI--Oct., 1927) John Farrar

"NEW HAMPSHIRE, a book of which America may well be proud, contains the most profound and the most beautiful poetry that Frost has published."

E. WEST-RUNNING BROOK

In 1925 appeared Frost's next publication WEST-RUNNING BROOK. A well-known critic* characterizes its contents as follows:

"In WEST-RUNNING BROOK there is much less of the domestic drama and more of the personal song than usual; less of the stark, intense human sympathy with farmer folk and more of self-revelation. But the song is still redolent of New Hampshire and him; it is tender and tranquil like a hill at sunset and as strong, the common terms of actual talk loping in lean, casual rhythms as cool as snow, as packed and pungent as dead leaves and dead-leaf smoke and cut plug through night air."

The poem which gives the volume its name seems to have some personal significance, especially in these lines:

"What does it think it's doing running west
When all the other country brooks flow east
To reach the ocean? It must be the brook
Can trust itself to go by contraries."

This is exactly the case with author's own poetic stream.

In several of the many short poems which follow this one, the reader may catch glimpses of what Gibson** refers to as

*Joseph Auslander --The Forum, Dec., 1928

** THE GOLDEN ROOM--W. W. Gibson

"Frost's rich and ripe philosophy

That had the body and tang of good draught cider

And poured as clear as a stream."

More than once one notes his quiet acceptance of life, his willingness to say, "Let what will be, be," as seen in these quotations from ACCEPTANCE:

"Let the night be too dark for me to see
Into the Future."

and

"Heaven gives its glimpses only to those

In no position to look too close."

Another comment on life appears in the poem, THE BEAR, where he describes man as one, like the caged animal,

"That all day fights a nervous inward rage

His mood reflecting all his mind suggests,

Given a look in the east,

The telescope at one end of his beat,

And at the other end the microscope."

In RIDERS, too, are these thought-arresting lines:

"The surest thing there is, is we are riders,

And though none too successful at it, guiders

Through everything presented, land and tide

And now the very air, of what we ride.

What is this talked--of mystery of birth

But being mounted bareback on the earth?"

Frost has drawn many other fundamental truths from observation of ordinary things and usual occurrences. He does not preach nor force theories on his readers. Rather he is a discoverer of truth, which he takes pleasure in

sharing with his neighbors.

In contrast with Frost's deeper meditation one finds plenty of the whimsical in this book of verse,--bits like

"The rain to the wind said,

You push, and I'll belt."

and these lines from SAND DUNES:

"They are the sea made land

To come at the fisher town,

And bury in solid sand

The men she could not drown."

It is in CANIS MAJOR that he is in one of his most jovial moods when describing how

"The great Overdog,

That heavenly beast

With a star in one eye,

Gives a leap in the east.

He dances upright

All the way to the west

And never once drops

On his forefeet to rest."

The closing stanza is the most delightful;

"I'm a poor underdog

But to-night I will bark

With the great Overdog

That roams through the dark."

There is something of whimsy in A PECK OF GOLD, the only one of two poems based on the years spent in California. In

the closing stanza of this poem we have the western version of an old New England household saying:

"Such was life in the Golden Gate:

Gold dusted all we drank and ate,

And I was one of the children told,

We all must eat our peck of gold!"

As one might expect, there are many nature poems in WEST-RUNNING BROOK, among the finest of which is TREE AT MY WINDOW, an address to an "intimate friend" of whom he speaks as follows:

"That day she put our heads together,

Fate had her imagination about her,

Your head so much concerned with outer,

Mine with inner, weather."

A WINTER EDEN, FIREFLIES IN THE GARDEN, A MINOR BIRD, and SPRING POOLS are others which give proof of the skill of this poet whose lyrics are permeated with God's out-of-doors.

Taken as a whole, this volume impresses one as being among the ripest and best of Frost's works.

F. COLLECTED POEMS

About a year ago COLLECTED POEMS OF ROBERT FROST appeared. "In itself, that is enough to mark any literary season with distinction," writes Dorothy Canfield Fisher.* A comparatively small sized volume, it holds all the poems the author has cared to preserve for more than a quarter of

*ROBERT FROST--POET AND PHILOSOPHER--Dorothy Canfield Fisher
(CURRENT LITERATURE: Jan. 12--16, 1931)--Page 66

a century. One finds therein all the old favorites and several new ones that have not heretofore appeared.

G. His Work Viewed as a Whole.

Frost's poetic output has been smaller than that of most poets of high rank. He has refused to have anything but his best work published. He casts aside all poems he feels are mediocre, considering them as practice work only. Quality not quantity, has been his ideal and he has not allowed popularity to hurry him into print. Since he makes no effort to publish volumes regularly and often, the years between are periods of preparation and growth. When a new collection of his poems does appear, it is an event in literature, for Frost seldom gives the world a poem it is not glad to receive. Usually they are poems to cherish and remember.

This poet never has taught himself to write when occasion demands. Rather he waits upon his moods. When they come, he writes rapidly, seldom revising even his most successful poems, yet he succeeds in achieving a polished perfection. A visitor describes him as using a writing board made from an old box, because he says he can't produce satisfactory results with a finished one. Frost believes, if possible, in working out an idea as soon as it flashes into his mind. If he cannot give it attention, he keeps his mind averted from it, for he is of the belief that a poem is ruined by too much thinking about it.

There is little change of tone throughout the six volumes of Frost's poems. He is not an author of experiments or surprises, seeming to have chosen to excel in the skillful portrayal of the sort of thing he knows best, rather than in range

and variety. Never has he essentially modified his outlook on life or his literary manner, yet with every book his touch has seemed to grow surer and more personal. Often a writer's first publication meets high acclaim, then what follows seems to deteriorate in quality. In Frost's case, since his first volume of poems appeared in 1915, each succeeding book from his pen has seemed to strengthen the high regard in which he is held.

New England seems to have furnished all Frost's inspiration. Of course, the fact that he depends on personal discovery by means of his own eyes and ears, limits his locality. Yet, though his territory is limited, he has dug deep. There is never a trace of superficiality in Frost's poetry. In the words of Untermeyer,* "he picks his own route among a thousand trodden paths, which is harder than the imaginative conceptions of the romanticist, for his readers can easily judge of the reality of his descriptions and character studies." Robert Frost is a sufficiently great artist to be almost independent of subject. He is able to dispense with sensational matter and achieve poetic effects from accustomed things of everyday living. He even brings in such things as kitchen-sinks, stove-pipes, and telegraph poles, which are not commonly included in the domain of poetry and succeeds in creating an atmosphere about them. Not adventure, but his own experience, seems to have determined all that he has written. Parts even of this are absent. There is nothing reminiscent of his life

in the mills, of the World War, or his stay in England. He has included in his poetry nothing regarding social movements or world tendencies.

V. Frost's Theory of Poetry

Frost has a distinct theory in the making of poetry, which, he says, falls into four types:

1. The uncommon in experience, likewise uncommon in writing.
2. The common in experience as well as in writing.
3. The uncommon in experience which is common in writing.
4. The common in experience that is uncommon in writing.*

The last, he insists is the proper material and method for literature. He interprets the common in experience as including not only subject matter, but tone and words. Frost declares that a complete poem is one where an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found the words, that a poem begins with "a lump in the throat, a homesickness, or a love-sickness" and is "a reaching-out toward expression; an effort to find fulfillment."** Benjamin records Frost as saying, "Poems come as follows: first a tone, a note, an inspiration, then images to make a complete pattern and at last the words flow into place."*** After having followed this theory through the years, Frost once modestly observed, "I am surprised that the lines spin themselves as they do. With the years of craftsmanship has come assurance, a knowledge that the power which produced one poem can produce another."

This poet is quite unmindful of literary conventionalities,

*ROBERT FROST--Gorham B. Munson--P.48

**THE NEW ERA IN AMERICAN POETRY (Robert Frost--P.39)

--Louis Untermeyer

*** ROBERT FROST--POET OF NEIGHBORLINESS--P.319

(THE SURVEY--Nov. 27, 1920--Paul L. Benjamin

preferring to be faithful to reality. He illustrates his policy by a homely figure,* saying, "A man who makes really good literature is like a fellow who goes into the fields to pull carrots. He keeps on pulling them patiently enough until he finds a carrot that suggests something to him. It is not shaped like other carrots. He takes out his knife and notches it here and there, until the two pronged roots become legs and the carrot takes on something of the semblance of a man. The real genius takes hold of that bit of life which is suggestive to him and gives it form. But the man who is merely an idealist and not a genius, will try to carve a donkey where no donkey is suggested by the carrot he pulls."

Frost has succeeded in avoiding the extremes of materialism and idealism. His realism is of the finer sort, as suggested by another of his apt illustrations. "There are two types of realists," he declares,** "the one who offers a good deal of dirt with his potato to show that it is a real one and the one who is satisfied with the potato brushed clean. I'm inclined to be the second kind. To me, the thing art does for life is to clean it, to strip it to form."**

But content is not the only matter to which Frost gives careful attention. He once said, "In making a poem, you have no right to think of anything but the subject matter; after making it, no right to boast of anything but the form. A poem must be at least as good as the prose it might have been.

*NEW VOICES--Marquerite Wilkinson--P.207

**AMERICAN POETRY SINCE 1900--Louis Untermeyer--P.18

It is a box with a set or assortment of sentences that just fit together to fill it. You are rhyming sentences and phrases, not just words. They must go into it as unchanged in size and shape as the words." *

Occasional rhyming quatrains and couplets are to be found in Frost's verse. A PASSING GLIMPSE is an example of the use of the latter, while for the poem, A STAR IN A STONE BOAT, he chose the triplet. THE LOCKLESS DOOR and THE NEED OF BEING VERSED IN COUNTRY THINGS have the abcb rhyme scheme. In A WINTER EDEN, the first two and last two lines rhyme, while the abab pattern is employed in the poem, THE AIM WAS SONG. Though his poems may often seem quite casual, they usually have some symmetrical pattern, for Frost's effects are never accidental. For example, the twenty-one lines of THE RUNAWAY have the following rhyme scheme:

a b c c b c a b c c a b c a a b c c b d d

However, his most characteristic metre is the one most often used in English literature. While he adopts the traditional blank verse pattern, he does not hesitate to depart from the regular iambic measure when natural conversational tones demand it, believing that the best poetry results from a discriminating compromise between the spoken word and the verse pattern. A somewhat informal writer, he tries to capture and hold within metrical lines the very tones of speech that fall from the lips of living folk. He does not employ dialect, vernacular, or slang. Because he feels that "words are worse than nothing unless they can do something, unless they amount to deeds," his poetry is characterized by clear-cut effects of

*ROBERT FROST: A Study in Sensibility and Good Sense--P.97
--Gorham B. Munson

**ROBERT FROST--Gorham B. Munson--P.98

rare vividness. It has the flexible intimacy of conversation, which results in a certain unevenness, but mere song is not the gift of this master of poetry that talks.

In thus attempting to substitute spoken for written rhythms, Frost has made a real innovation in poetry. Refusing to be tied by technique, he has achieved the goal he set for himself. Readers who approach his work with preconceived notions of how it should scan, often find it difficult and disappointing. Robert Frost is not a poetical poet, yet he is a true poet. It is only that he prefers to take the old racial rhythm of our language as his basic pattern and refuses to sacrifice the cadences of speech to mere metrical form. The poet himself says that anyone who reads his verse naturally cannot read it wrong.

By departing temporarily from regular iambic pentameter measure, he often gains in spontaneity. "It is a good plan," declares Frost, "to let the spoken word and the verse pattern fight out the issue." * Readers of his poetry will observe that he allows neither of these rival factors, the absolute rhythm demanded by word accents or the flexible rhythm needed for particular stresses of certain words, to be entirely subjected to the other. Rather he strikes the happy medium between over-looseness and over-tightness of rhythm, either of which destroys the spell for the reader.

Professor Phelps** says of Frost's metrical form: "He is as far from free verse as he can stretch." Frost recently

*Robert Frost in American Authors of To-day--Percy H. Boynton (P.459)

**COLD PASTORAL--William Lyon Phelps
(THE BOOKMAN: Vol. 47) --P.135

wrote to THE YALE NEWS a letter discussing the faults of undergraduate poetry, in which he said, "The difference between good poetry and free verse--or whatever you call it--is that the good poet reveals his idea at the very last line. And when the last word has been said, every reader should wish he had been able to sense that very idea before the poet expressed it." Frost's reputation has been built by following closely this and the other foregoing theories.

VI. Outstanding Characteristics of his Poetry.

Of all the characteristics which distinguish Frost's poetry, its freshness makes the first impression. At first, it seems apparently simple and what anyone else might have written, but as one proceeds, he is keenly aware that no one ever has said that thing before. In the poem, THE MOUNTAIN, appears the line:

"All the fun's in how you say a thing."

When THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY called Frost "an authentic, original voice in literature," its editor might well have been thinking of lines like:

"Something there is that doesn't love a wall."

Frost has a rare facility in choosing titles. Those applied to the first five volumes of his verse are all distinctive, as well as many of those given to individual poems. The examples which follow are far from hackneyed:

Fragmentary Blue

The Valley's Singing Day

Not to Keep

Nothing Gold Can Stay

A Dream Pang

The Trial by Existence

In addition to his originality, there is a certain vigorous pungency and intensity that cannot lie overlooked. This is often due to extreme concentration, an effort to pack every line with meaning. His is the power to say much in little, as in the story of THE SELF-SEEKER:

"When I saw the shaft had me by the coat
I didn't try too long to pull away,
Or fumble for my knife to cut away,
I just embraced the shaft and rode it out."

Yet never, as in Browning's case, can Frost be accused of lack of lucidity because of much condensation.

Frost's absolute clarity of imagery is achieved by the frequent use of such original figures of speech as the following:

"The mountain pushed us off her knees
And now her lap is full of trees."

"Clouds, low and hairy in the skies
Like locks blown in the gleam of eyes."

"The house had gone to bring again
To the midnight sky a sunset glow.
Now the chimney was all of the house that stood,
Like a pistil after the petals go."

"To think to know the country and not know
The hillside on the day the sun lets go
Ten million silver lizards out of snow!"

Much of the fresh, unspoiled effect of Frost's poetry comes

The Trial of Elizabeth

In addition to the original, there is a certain...
...and...
...is...
...the...
...is...

is the story of the...
...

When I saw the...
...

I didn't...
...

Or...
...

I just...
...

Yet never...
...

at...
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"The...
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And...
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"The...
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To...
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For...
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Like...
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The...
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from the imaginative combinations so frequently appearing in it. Who but Frost would describe a cord of maple as left

"To warm the frozen swamp as best it could
With the slow smokeless burning of decay."

Further examples of "simple words majestically assembled" are found in the following lines so full of striking and truthful detail:

"I noticed that I missed stars in the west,
Where its black body cut into the sky.
The river at the time was fallen away
And made a widespread brawl on cobble stone."

"I dream upon the night-hawks peopling heaven
Each circling each with vague unearthly cry,
Or plunging headlong with fierce twang afar."

Other great lines are:

"The trial by market everything must come to."

and
"All out-of-doors looked darkly in at him."

For sheer beauty of expression, it would be hard to find a lovelier passage than this:

"Part of a moon was falling down the west,
Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills.
Its light poured softly in her lap. She saw it
Among the harp like morning glory strings,
Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves,
As if she played unheard some tenderness
That wrought on him beside her in the night."

from the landscape, appearing as if it were a part of the
land. Who can blame a person for not seeing it as such?
"So when the light came, as here it could
be seen, the light was a part of the land."
"The light was a part of the land, as the light was a part of the land."
"The light was a part of the land, as the light was a part of the land."
"The light was a part of the land, as the light was a part of the land."

And then:

"I noticed that I missed more in the way,
than the light, only out into the sky.
The river at the time was full of water,
and made a different kind of sound when it
flowed."

"I know when the light was a part of the land,
each of the light, each with its own light,
or perhaps, perhaps with its own light."

Other light was:

"The light was a part of the land, as the light was a part of the land."

and

"All out-of-doors looked dark, as if it were a part of the land."

The light was a part of the land, as the light was a part of the land, it would be hard to find

a part of the land, as the light was a part of the land.

"Part of the land was a part of the land, as the light was a part of the land."

Looking at the light, the light was a part of the land, as the light was a part of the land."

The light was a part of the land, as the light was a part of the land, it would be hard to find

among the light, the light was a part of the land, as the light was a part of the land."

"The light was a part of the land, as the light was a part of the land, it would be hard to find

As if the light was a part of the land, as the light was a part of the land, it would be hard to find

"The light was a part of the land, as the light was a part of the land, it would be hard to find

Wherever possible, beauty characterizes his poems, but beauty or not, reality is there. Munson* writes, "His are the exact perceptions of a new discoverer." So realistic are his scenes, it is almost as if he were talking to his readers as they sit together by an open fire. An example of Frost's sharp precision and the clarity of images that abounds in his work is seen in this picture from THE DEATH OF THE HIRED MAN:

"Mary sat musing on the lamp-flame at the table
Waiting for Warren. When she heard his step,
She ran on tip-toe down the darkened passage
To meet him in the doorway with the news
And put him on his guard. 'Silas is back.'
She pushed him outward with her through the door
And shut it after her. 'Be kind,' she said.
She took the market things from Warren's arms
And set them on the porch, then drew him down
To sit beside her on the wooden steps."

It is this genuineness in Frost's work, born of knowledge gained from intimate contact with men and things, that appeals. The reader feels that Frost has himself grasped "the long scythe whispering to the ground" and worn his fingers rough with handling "the boulders that have fallen each to each;" that he has shared the joys and sorrows of the folk in his poems; and that he understands the thoughts and feelings of those stern, silent New Englanders. No one abhors the fanciful and exotic in poetry more than he. His chief desire seems to be to tell the truth in

his poetry. In this achievement lies the secret for its chance for permanence.

Simplicity often has a more telling effect than elaboration. It is used with particularly clear-cut effect in the passage:

"She stood against the kitchen sink, and looked
Over the sink out through a dusty window
At weeds the water from the sink made tall.

And now and then a smudged, infernal face
Looked in a door behind her and addressed
Her back,-----

'Where will I put this walnut bureau, lady?'"

Frost's poems are filled with simple, absolutely natural descriptions that defy imitation. We all have seen

"Blueberries as big as the end of your thumb,
Real sky blue, and heavy and ready to drum
In the cavernous pail of the first one to come."

yet few poets could picture them so simply and vividly. Oftentimes this very simplicity is so used as to give Frost's readers the impression that his work is bare and bony. There is a certain hardness of outline, mainly due to his economy of words, but this is in keeping with the New England temperament and climate which form the background of most of his poems. His verse has, as Freeman* beautifully suggests, "the strength as well as the whiteness of a brave winter tree with a solitary bird sing-

ROBERT FROST in

*CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN AUTHORS--John Freeman--P.34

the matter. In the meantime, I have been thinking of the

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ing on from morning to night." Certainly there is nothing of rhetorical swagger about Frost's work. He never employs exaggeration for effects, realizing that one comes nearest to the sublime in the quiet beating of the human heart and the inner workings of the mind. He has no extraordinary happenings to record, yet simply, without manipulation, he makes the utmost of restricted material. Frost's place of leadership among contemporary American poets has been attained largely through his having achieved the triumph of painting the prosaic in scenes of human interest as no other recent poet has done.

The various moods in the poems of this unusual author are interesting. He gives us both dramatic sadness and lyric gladness. Usually there is a saving sense of humor, of a subtle, playful sort. In the poem, A MINOR BIRD, the sort of impatient intolerance that overtakes everyone at times, may be noted. Even the pleasantest things, oft repeated occasionally become unbearable. Here it is a bird's song which seems to continue interminably. Swiftly impatience turns to a feeling of shame "in wanting to silence any song." Always between the lines we feel his quiet, confident faith as expressed in the line,

"Something must be left to God."

He sees life as a balance of the bitter and the sweet, and, without questioning or despair accepts this world as one of joy and love mingled with pain and weariness, wherein Nature is a sort of friendly antagonist. He seems chiefly interested in the present, never brooding over past joys, or fearful of the future. One finds nothing of a cynical attitude in this poet. Nor is he either sentimental, or morbid. Frost once

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almost secret, in the poem, "A MINOR BIRD," the sort of understated
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Even the oft-mentioned "stark, oft repeated occasionally become
substantial. Here it is a bird's song which seems to continue
interminably. Briefly, the poem turns to a feeling of release
in waiting to release any song. Always between the lines we
feel the quiet, confident faith as expressed in the line,
"Something must be left to God."

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without questioning or doubt, accepts this world as one of
joy and love mingled with pain and weakness, wherein Nature
is a sort of friendly antagonist. He seems chiefly interested
in the present, never brooding over past joys or fears of
the future. One finds nothing of a cynical attitude in this
poet. Nor is he either sentimental, or morbid. Frost once

remarked,* "It's well to have all kinds of feelings, for this is all kinds of a world." Grim or gay, matter-of-fact or fanciful, tender or ironical, readers readily respond to his many moods.

Frost has the habit of intermingling with narrative and description many universal truths which reveal his vision of life. One often comes upon such an unforgettable passage as this:

"The nearest friends can go
With anyone to death, comes so far short
They might as well not try to go at all.
No, from the time when one is sick to death,
One is alone and he dies more alone."

Often an arresting thought like the following merely grows out of a situation:

"Strange how such innocence gets its own way.
I shouldn't be surprised if in this world
It were the force that would at last prevail."

This typically far-sighted observation lingers in the memory:

"Why abandon a belief
Merely because it ceases to be true?
Cling to it long enough, and not a doubt
It will turn true again, for so it goes.
Most of the change we think we see in life
Is due to truths being in and out of favor.
As I sit here, and oftentimes I wish

As I sit here, and sometimes I wish

in due to some being in and out of favor.

Most of the chance we find we see in life

it will turn out again, for so it goes.

Glance to it later, and not a doubt

Merely because it comes to be true?

"Why abandon a belief

This twofold first-sighted observation figures in the memory:

It were the force that would at last prevail."

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I could be monarch of a desert land
 I could devote and dedicate forever
 To the truths we keep coming back to."

One of the shortest and most meaningful axioms to be found in his poetry is:

"What we live by, we die by."

Such are the lasting convictions of this gifted poet, who wrote:

"I do not see why I should e'er turn back."

and

"They would not find me changed from him they know--

Only more sure of all I thought was true."

One's admiration for the keen intellect of this man who thinks thoughts to a conclusion, grows with further acquaintance. Frost is far more interested in the development of an idea, especially a wholly original one, than in the structure of his sentences. In fact, he has declared his fondness for "entertaining" an idea, not merely accepting it, but acting as host to it. "Some ideas," says he, "are merely acquaintances, while others are welcomed as friends."

Frost is never in too much of a hurry to speculate on small things. His finest thoughts seem to be aroused by contemplation of natural objects, as in the case of the closing couplet of A TUFT OF FLOWERS, which was called forth by a butterfly winging its way past "a leaping tongue of bloom:"

"Men work together, I told him from the heart,
 Whether they work together or apart."

He does not let his mind dwell on vague abstractions. It is the humble, homely matters which he handles with friendly

(Page 414)

*Robert Frost and Other Green Mountain Writers--P.584
 (The English Journal--Oct., 1927)

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"When work together, I told him from the heart,

Whether they work together or apart."

He does not let his mind dwell on vague speculations. It is
the simple, homely matters which he handles with facility

to love people in the love of it. Indeed, the invitation to intimacy. Frost reminds one of Whitman's statement:*

"The greatest poet hardly knows pettiness or triviality. If he breathes into anything that was before thought small, it dilates with the grandeur and life of the universe."

Robert Frost sees wonder and beauty in the everyday world. His poems always lead toward progress. The fact that his Coupling imagination with observation, he has succeeded in producing beautiful poems from the humblest materials. He impresses one as having made an accurate study of both nature and his neighbors, discovering what others are like through personal introspection. Nowhere in contemporary American poetry can one find more exquisite nature imagery, richer local atmosphere, or more farsighted interpretation. The poems of this New England genius may be easily identified because they bear the stamp of veracity.

It is remarkable how many different types of people he depicts. Preacher, professor, bridegroom, Yankee farmers, lovely women, each of his "heroes in homespun" seem very real to us. But he does more than merely picture them for us. Skillfully he leads attention from individual characters to the whole class of humanity they represent. Whatever the type of person described, we are ever aware of the fact that Frost has a tranquil faith in the dignity of the ordinary man and woman.

He has been a sort of missionary in the field of poetry. Believing it to be "a way of grappling with life," he has tried

*C. L. PASTORAL--William Lyon Phelps (THE BOOKMAN: Vol. 47

*PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION OF LEAVES OF GRASS**Walt Whitman

to lure people to the love of it. Indeed, the invitation to join him in song is the keynote of his poetry. His verse has in it a new note, not achieved elsewhere, yet it also has something of the flavor of the old English tradition. Though an independent poet, he does not cast aside the wisdom of his predecessors. He goes his own way, but he is no anarchist, for his method always leads toward progress. The fact that his poetry is both novel and conservative doubtless accounts for its pleasing so many readers. His unique style, which obeys its own laws of grace and beauty, has established a sure place among his contemporaries for this poet, whose genius lies in being different.

VII Comparison with Other Poets.

Having emphasized the distinctive individuality of Frost's poetry, it may be interesting to note special points of difference between him and other well known poets.

To Professor William Lyon Phelps* we owe one striking comparison. He refers to Vachel Lindsay as "a drum major marching gayly at the head of his big band, looking up and around at the crowd," and speaks of Frost as "a botanist who finds it sweet

'with unuplifted eyes

To pace the ground, if path there be or none.'"

Nor is he at all like Edgar Lee Masters whose cynical portrayal of life is in sharp contrast to Frost's dispassionate treatment of conditions. Moreover, the latter's sketches are more veracious than those of his fellow craftsman, for he has

*COLD PASTORAL--William Lyon Phelps (THE BOOKMAN: Vol. 47
P.134, April, 1918)

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*COLLE PASTORAL--William Lyon Phelps (THE BOOKMAN: Vol. 47 P. 134, April, 1918)

had a close-up view of the lives he pictures.

Unlike Bliss Carman, another singer of outdoor life, all of whose work was done in the zest of young manhood, Frost matured late, being practically unknown until middle life. This gives a certain mellowness to his work that Carman's necessarily lacks.

The poems of Robert Frost are less erudite than those of Edwin Arlington Robinson, but have a more general appeal. Though both writers have chosen similar territory, their handling of it is quite dissimilar. As Amy Lowell* put it:

"Mr. Robinson represents New England; Mr. Frost is New England. Mr. Robinson's characteristics are a composite of the New England of three centuries, while Mr. Frost typifies the New England of to-day in the country districts."

Frost stands out in sharp contrast to Carl Sandburg. Though the former has a point in common with him in employing colorful current idioms, the New Englander's work is always marked by dignity and refinement, it having none of the coarseness of some of the Westerner's poems.

Some idea of Frost's popularity with English and American readers is gained by a comparison of the sale of his poems with those of other modern writers. Excluding Edgar Guest's syndicated verses, only Masfield and Masters have surpassed him in this respect, even though he has been the least prolific of contemporary writers.

*TENDENCIES IN MODERN AMERICAN POETRY--Amy Lowell--P.80

had a close-up view of the lives of the people.

Unlike Blake, another singer of outdoor life, all

of whose work was done in the east of young London, Frost

retreated into the country, and he was not a city man. This

gives a certain mellowness to his work that Blake's harshness

lacks.

The poems of Frost are less creative than those of

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Frost stands out in sharp contrast to Carl Sandburg. Though

the latter has a point in common with him in working in the

current idiom, the New Englander's work is always marked by

directness and reticence, in having none of the ornamentation of some

of the Westerner's verse.

Some lines of Frost's poetry, especially with English and American

readers is found in a collection of the best of his poems with

those of other modern writers. Exploring the Frost's world-

wide verses, only Whitman and Keats have surpassed him in

this respect, even though he has been the least prolific of our

contemporary writers.

*THEODORE IN WINTER AMERICAN POETRY--Amy Lowell--P. 80

VIII. Conclusion.

The foregoing pages have attempted to show that Robert Frost, a man of rare gifts and unusual opportunities for developing his poetic genius, has given America poetry of which she may well be proud. He has preserved for posterity marvelously vivid pictures of a vanishing New England so well known to him and his ancestors. America is not the only nation that has come to realize his merit. Frost's poetic skill has increased with the years, until his work now holds foremost place in contemporary American poetry.

As further evidence of Frost's high place among recent verse writers, I have listed below certain estimates of prominent critics:

John Farrar,* former editor of THE BOOKMAN, declares:

"He has written the best bucolic poetry ever produced in America."

Editorial comment in the London SPECTATOR is as follows:

"Considering his work as a whole, we can think of no poet of his generation who seems to us more worthy to survive."

Elliott** says, "He has epitomized intuitively this larger world of ours, in which the ideal of human brotherhood is now being put through the drab test of actual and local conditions. Thus, while aiming to be faithfully local, Mr. Frost has become more deeply representative than many poets who have set them-

*ROBERT FROST AND OTHER GREEN MOUNTAIN WRITERS--John Farrar.
(THE ENGLISH JOURNAL--Oct., 1927)--P.583

**THE NEIGHBORLINESS OF ROBERT FROST--G. R. Elliott
(THE NATION: Vol. 109--Dec. 6, 1919)--P.713

The first point to be noted is that Robert Frost, a man of rare gifts and unusual opportunities for developing his poetic genius, has given America poetry of which she can well be proud. He has observed for posterity a new and vivid picture of a vanishing New England so well known to him and his contemporaries. America is not the only nation that has come to realize the value of Frost's poetic skill and has rewarded with the years, until his work has become the most precious in contemporary American poetry.

As further evidence of Frost's high place among modern writers, I have fitted below certain early lines of some of his poems:

John Berryman, former editor of THE NEW YORKER, declares:

"He has written the best American poetry ever produced in America."

Editorial comment in the Boston SPECTATOR is as follows:

"Considering his work as a whole, we can think of no poet of his generation whose work is more worthy to survive."

Elizabeth Arden, "He has solidified the best of the larger world of art, in which the best of human brotherhood is now being and through the work of such a poet and poetess."

Thus, while adding to the list of the best of human brotherhood, Frost has become more and more representative than any poet who has yet lived.

ROBERT FROST AND OTHER POETS, NEW YORK: THE NEW YORKER, 1937, p. 283.
THE SPECTATOR, 1937, p. 113.
THE NEW YORKER, 1937, p. 113.
THE NEW YORKER, 1937, p. 113.

selves at catching the spirit of our age." : "Robert Frost

Gorham B. Munson* goes so far as to say, "The purest classical poet of America to-day, is Robert Frost. His poetry moves in a direction opposite to the main currents of his age. Mr. Frost is the most humorous of all our living poets. Others may be witty, sardonic, satirical; he stands apart, unrivaled by his American contemporaries for sweet, sanative humor."

"What makes him, as I believe," writes Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant,** "the most authentic poet of his age is that he is a star-gazer, who writes for the satisfaction of his own curiosity. Every poem is a new discovery."

There is no lukewarmness in this prediction of Dorothy Canfield Fisher: "Farmer, poet, teacher, and philosopher, Robert Frost bids fair to be one of America's immortals."

Says Theodore Maynard, an English critic, "His poems are of the highest importance as social history--if as nothing else, for men in coming generations will turn to them, after time has wrought its slow changes, to find in them the forgotten aspects of their ancestors."

"This poetic feeling for ordinary life," declares Louis Untermeyer*** "is the bond that unites most of the younger poets of our day--in none is it expressed so simply and yet so richly as in the work of Robert Frost." The same critic

(The Bookman, July, 1930--P.419)

*ROBERT FROST AND THE HUMANISTIC TEMPER--Gorham B. Munson

**ROBERT FROST IN FIRE UNDER THE ANDES--P.87

--Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant

***ROBERT FROST IN THE NEW ERA IN AMERICAN POETRY--P.16

--Louis Untermeyer

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recently declared to a Springfield audience: "Robert Frost is the greatest living poet in America. Indeed, he is the greatest living poet in the world to-day. This man is one of three great pastoral poets, ranking with Virgil and Wordsworth."

There is a quality all its own. Simple, genuine, and lovely different in form and subject matter, his poems always reflect the spontaneous sincerity and originality.

Frost is a true interpreter of the New England countryside, having nine generations of Yankee ancestors behind him. He witnessed his background so that his characters, nearly all products of isolated farm life, were real people. There is the very ring of the soil in his poems, which are racy with current speech.

Though born in San Francisco, he returned, as a young boy, to Massachusetts, where he obtained his early education. It was during his school days that a taste for poetry was first formed.

He failed to receive an either Harvard or Harvard long enough to obtain a degree. But, in spite of struggles to gain a livelihood in various occupations his desire to become a poet never waned.

Not long after his marriage to Elmer White, he took up life on a farm in Dorset, N. H., where he till'd the soil and continued to write verse. Most of that submitted to leading magazines was refused. Had he been willing to change his course to suit the editors, he might have received earlier public recognition, but Frost insisted on tilling the road

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SUMMARY

The work of Robert Frost has aroused favorable comment in these days of renewed interest in contemporary poetry, because it has a quality all its own. Simple, genuine, absolutely different in form and subject matter, his poems attract readers who appreciate sincerity and originality.

Frost is a true interpreter of the New England countryside, having nine generations of Yankee ancestors behind him. He vitalizes his backgrounds so that his characters, nearly all products of isolated farm life, seem real people. There is the very tang of the soil in his poems, which are racy with current speech.

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SUMMARY

The work of Robert Frost has aroused favorable comment in these days of a renewed interest in contemporary poetry, because it has a quality all its own. Simple, genuine, deeply different in form and subject matter, his poems attract readers who appreciate simplicity and originality. Frost is a true interpreter of the New England countryside, having his own generation of Yankee ancestors behind him. He visualizes his backyards so that his observations, nearly all products of isolated farm life, seem real people. There is the very ring of the soil in his poems, which are truly with current speech.

Though born in San Francisco, he returned, as a young boy, to Massachusetts, where he obtained his early education. It was during his school days that a taste for poetry was first formed.

He failed to remain at either Dartmouth or Harvard long enough to obtain a degree. But, in spite of struggles to gain a livelihood in various occupations his desire to become a poet never waned.

Not long after his marriage to Elizabeth White, he took up life on a farm in Derry, N. H., where he filled the soil and continued to write verse. Most of that submitted to leading magazines was returned. Had he been willing to change his course to suit the editors, he might have received earlier public recognition, but Frost insisted on taking the road

"less traveled by."

He finally sought the more lucrative position of teacher at Pinkerton Academy, where he became a new and vitalizing influence. Though the faculty looked askance at a teacher of such irregular training, his ability to stimulate students to creative writing was soon recognized. Later the State Normal School at Plymouth, N. H. sought his services.

It was during a sojourn in England, where his poetic ability was readily recognized, that his first two volumes, *A BOY'S WILL* and *NORTH OF BOSTON* were published.

On returning to this country, Frost devoted his attention to farming, lecturing, and verse writing. His skill in the last two fields far excelled his farming methods.

He became a member of the faculty of Amherst College and was later called by the University of Michigan to accept a fellowship in creative art.

In recent years he has been eagerly sought as lecturer both by leading universities and by the public. Also he has been the recipient of many honors, chief among them being the Pulitzer prizes.

Of interesting appearance and attractive personality, Frost views life as a precious, exciting adventure. He is as good a friend and neighbor as he is a poet. Unassuming and utterly free from the lure of fame, he is vitally interested in his art. One feels that he has lived what he depicts. The quiet, unhurried life he leads amid the beauty of the New England hills has aided in the development of a rare personality and the production of distinctive poetry. Both have won for

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and the production of distinctive poetry. Both have won for

him the admiration and affection of those who know him best.

His first volume of poetry, *A BOY'S WILL* is the fruition of years of introspection. It shows rare understanding of nature and a philosophic tendency, being obviously the work of a thinker, one desirous of coming to an understanding of life's incongruous web.

NORTH OF BOSTON is less subjective than the first book. It is made up largely of dramatic dialogs involving characters of rugged horse sense and rocklike emotions, whose bodies are hardened by toil and whose souls are affected by loneliness and monotony. Particular occurrences in their lives are so vividly depicted against hill-country backgrounds Frost knew intimately and so true to character, that what might have been mere incidents take on a universal significance. Choosing monolog or dialog most frequently, Frost presents the stories in the idiomatic speech of the Yankees among whom he has lived. He handles both tragic and humorous situations with rare sympathy and keen insight. There is little question but that Frost is a writer of folk poetry of a high order and especially skilled in manipulating dramatic situations.

In *MOUNTAIN INTERVAL*, which contains more of both lyrics and dramatic narratives, Frost's oneness with nature is especially well shown. Many of the poems in this volume have a wintry atmosphere, for the season of snow and icy winds seems particularly to attract this poet of Northern New England. The book abounds in studies of human nature and shows steady development in the types of poetry Frost most often essays.

Seven years later the volume, *NEW HAMPSHIRE*, which con-

him the satisfaction of seeing the work of his hands
and the better voice of poetry. A NEW YORKER in the
of years of its publication. It shows the understanding of
nature and a philosophical tendency, but the quality of the work
of a lifetime, one destined to come to an understanding of
life's unconscious was.

WORTHY TO BEHOLD is a book more than the first book.
It is made up largely of dramatic dialogues involving characters
of rugged horse sense and rosy cheeks, whose bodies are
sharpened by toil and whose souls are affected by loneliness
and loneliness. But their consciousness in their lives are so
vividly depicted against the background of their lives that
they are not to be forgotten, that what might have been
mere incidents take on a universal significance. Choosing
scenery of their own, Frost presents the stories
in the idyllic beauty of the Yankee manner whom he has lived.
He handles both tragic and humorous situations with rare eye-
sight and keen insight. There is little question but that
Frost is a writer of high poetic of a high order and necessarily
filled in with the dramatic elements.

IN MOUNTAIN INTERLUDE, which contains more of such little
and dramatic narratives, Frost's command of nature is even
clearer and more. Most of the poems in this volume have a
quietly eloquent, for the season of snow and ice which seems
particularly to attract this poet of Northern New England.
The book abounds in studies of human nature and shows steady
development in the types of poetry Frost has often chosen.
Seven years later the volume, NEW HARBINGER, which con-

tains much of whimsical humor, was published. Here, too, in this book which shows more mature power, we find idyls of farm life presented with skillful realism. There is much of delicate beauty in the "grace notes." Some of Frost's most telling effects are produced with unusual economy of words. Whether delving into the supernatural or weaving a glamor about ordinary folk and everyday aspects of nature, the poet's ripened ability is notable.

WEST-RUNNING BROOK, Frost's fifth publication, has still more of personal song. It is filled with passages of philosophic nature. But there is an intermingling of humor, giving a most attractive blend of Frost in his lighter and in his more serious vein. In this volume, as elsewhere, one is conscious of his deep love of the out-of-doors.

The best poems of his entire career have recently been published under the title, COLLECTED POEMS OF ROBERT FROST. It is a comparatively modest volume, for his output has been smaller than that of his contemporaries. Being extremely self-critical, Frost gives the public only his very best work. The general tone of his work has changed little, though each successive book has proved his ability to do the same thing better than before.

His choice of subject matter is limited to what he has gained through his own observation and experience amid the New England hills. A genuine artist, he never tries to amplify the fact. He has no tendency to be imitative, nor does he seek inspiration in books. Throughout his poems he gives in original and striking fashion the impressions the world

has made on him. Frost is a firm believer that the best poetry is based upon the common in experience which is uncommon in writing. His is a cool, fearless realism of the finer sort shot through with glints of idealism, for to him everyday living has the glamor of romance.

As to form, he adapts his rhythm and rhyme to the demands of the spoken word. There is always a metrical pattern in his poetry, but no rigidity of form, for he believes that the natural cadences of everyday speech should supersede any system of metrics. His usual choice is a modified form of iambic pentameter.

Another of his theories is that every poem should have a point and that it should not be fully disclosed until the very end of the poem.

Frost's outstanding qualities of style are a gift for tones of voice, an aptitude for concrete images, and a keen sense of the dramatic. He is an intuitive poet whose work is characterized by subtlety and solidity. Refreshingly original in theme and choice of words, there is in his poetry a crystallization of phrase that gives to a certain vigorous pungency. His is an ability to say much in very few words. Striking and unusual figures of speech contribute to the vividness of his work. Mere prettiness is entirely absent in his poems, but there is an indefinable beauty about them. They have a strong emotional appeal, sometimes to one's sense of humor and again to one's sympathy. Frost has succeeded in turning the speech of ordinary men and women into poetry as no

has made on him.

There is a firm believer that the best poetry is based upon the common in experience which is uncommon in writing.

His is a cool, fearless realism of the finer sort shown with a hint of idealism, for to him everyday living has the flavor of romance.

As to form, he rejects his rhythm and rhyme to the demands of the spoken word. There is always a metrical pattern in his poetry, but no rigidity of form, for he believes that the natural cadences of everyday speech should supersede any artificial pattern. His usual choice is a modified form of flexible pentameter.

Another of his theories is that every poem should have a point and that it should not be fully disclosed until the very end of the poem.

There is something about his style that is a little far from of voice, an attitude for concrete images, and a keen sense of the dramatic. He is an intuitive poet whose work is shaped more by instinct and feeling than by technique.

Original in form and choice of words, there is in his poetry a revitalization of phrase that gives it a certain vigorousness. His is a quality of art that is very few words.

Stirring and unusual figures of speech contribute to the vividness of his work. More originality is entirely absent in his poems, but there is an indefinable beauty about them.

They have a strong emotional appeal, appealing to one's sense of humor and again to one's sympathy. There are suggestions in turning the words of ordinary men and women into poetry as no

other writer has done. His work is unsensational, but genuine, sincere, and extremely challenging.

One finds a variety of moods in his poems. He is now thoughtful and philosophic, accepting the circumstances of life graciously, neither regretting the past nor fearing the future. Again he may be in a spirit of sly whimsy or quite the opposite,--tragic and grim.

He applies his keen intellect to the contemplation of the humblest matters and draws therefrom conclusions that grip the reader's attention. This poet of sight and insight cleaves firmly to the truth, especially in character portrayal. He pictures a variety of types so that they seem almost flesh and blood people whose speech we seem actually to hear, though it comes to us through the medium of the printed page. Though his range is but a few hundred miles, he digs deep. Probably his own struggle to gain a meager living from stone-infested farms was exactly what he needed to enable him to portray New England people and scenery with such extraordinary vividness. The pathos of deserted farms and dwindling villages is in his poems, but he does not brood on them. They are merely stages on which are transacted human tragedies and comedies.

Wisely combining his own theories of what makes good poetry with the best qualities of earlier poets, he has given lovers of verse a new and powerfully persuasive type of literature. He keeps to the methods and kinds of poetry he can handle best, and by so doing, has won for himself a very high place among contemporary poets.

A quieter, more unobtrusive poet than Vachel Lindsay;

other writer has done. His work is unseasonal, but his
style, sincere, and extremely challenging.

On a variety of occasions in his career. He is now
thoughtful and philosophical, accepting the circumstances of
his position. Neither regretting the past nor fearing
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free from the cynicism of Edgar Lee Masters; doing his best work years after the age when Bliss Carman had finished his contribution to poetry; a less learned, more appealing poet than Edwin Arlington Robinson, Frost's work lacks the coarseness and sordidness of Sandburg's, and his popularity, as shown by the sale of his books, exceeds that of all but Masefield and Masters, though he has published less than his fellow craftsmen.

Because Frost gives a faithful representation of the minds and hearts of common folk in simple, beautiful poetry, he has won a special place in the hearts of a host of readers. A close companion of nature, he has become a sort of spiritual interpreter of New England life and scenery. These qualities, together with his sincerity, his dramatic power, and his pungent style make him a leading spirit in contemporary American poetry.

Further tributes paid to him by well known critics are that he is the writer of the best bucolic poetry in America, which is more representative than that of many poets who have made a special effort to catch the spirit of the age; that he is the finest humorist among living poets; that he is a writer of vision whose poems will be consulted by future generations for authentic information on the life of New England rural communities, who, because he has written pastoral poetry so rich in truth and beauty, is now classed as our greatest living poet.

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